

Zenith

Brief Game Overview

Zenith is essentially a 3D platform game with fighting and puzzle elements where the overall objective is simple, get to the top. The action takes place on a series of six towers, each with a different graphical style. Each tower consists of 5-6 levels, giving a total of 30-35 levels for the game.

The player controls a humanoid figure who walks, runs, climbs and has special moves for fighting and acrobatics. The player is able to choose four characters from a possible sixteen, each with different attributes and special moves, and can morph between these characters during play to utilise their particular strengths/moves. The player's progress to the top is made more difficult by the various block and surface types on the landscape, and by computer opponents who guard ledges and platforms.

In two player mode the computer opponents are no longer present and the game becomes a straight race between player one and player two. Two player mode features a unique 360degree split screen which allows each player to know where the other player is in relation to them, and gives the best possible view.

Past Problems

Over-Complicated Initial Design:

The initial code design for Zenith was **far too complicated**, and this complexity added nothing to the game. Had the current Zenith team tried to continue with this design, Zenith would be released at Christmas 2012 on Nintendo's Ultra 1024 machine. Instead we greatly simplified the landscape, and animations, which strangely enough gave us more scope for improving the gameplay.

Motion Capture:

Another non-starter. Wasted valuable development time trying to get MC to work, but it was finally decided to go with hand animations which at the scale we are using

give very acceptable results, and are much more easily controlled.

2D Collision Map:

The use of a 2D collision map (part of the initial code design) may be memory efficient but it is not very usable without using a lot of processor time.

Project Interruptions:

Zenith has suffered many interrupts and setbacks during it's development, such as:

1. Development staff leaving the project.
2. No hardware until October 95.
3. Always second to Body Harvest resource-wise.
4. Sniff

Lack of 3D experience:

Initially very few people who knew much about 3D, coupled with new hardware meant a lot of trial and error and learning.

Current Status

Positive meetings have taken place to add some real gameplay. This has been undertaken by the team as a team and everybody is a lot happier with the resulting design. For the first time it has become clear how the game is going to look and play, and that the final product is going to be more than just a running, climbing and jumping game.

Code currently exists in various stages of completion for animating, and positioning characters on the game landscape, projectiles, collision detection, moving blocks, drawing and clipping of the game area, and basic computer AI. As much of the code involves collision detection there are still major parts of this to be completed and problems solved.

Future Problems

Level Design:

Level design will make or break Zenith. Zenith levels are huge, and will require a lot of time to construct. The worry is that there will be rush to get levels done, resulting in levels that are boring to play or don't utilise all the game's features to their potential.

On-Schedule Completion:

With the transferral of programmers and artists to Body Harvest, Zenith is currently down to 2 programmers and 1 artist. Although this will lengthen the development time we are hoping a "blitz" approach will not be adopted, which could jeopardise the quality of the final product and fragment the team spirit.